

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

UNTOUCHABLE CASTES

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Mala

(An untouchable caste)

Madiga

(An untouchable caste)

The above table does not include the Panch Bramha group. In point of religion they are Hindus, but their position in the caste hierarchy is rather uncertain. This group comprises five divisions: The Wadla (carpenter), the Kammari (blacksmith), the Ausula (goldsmith), the Kase (carver of figures in wood and stone) and the Kanchari (worker in bell-metal). Of these only the first three sections are found in Shamirpet. Inter-dining and inter-marrying, these sections constitute a distinct group of their own. In the local caste hierarchy they should be placed below the Kapu-Kummari-Golla group, but it cannot be said that they rank equal to or below the Sale-Gaondla group.

Among Hindus the Brahmin holds the highest place. He 564 officiates at the ceremonies of all castes, except those of the Vad- 793 dar, the Erkala, the Pichha-Kuntla, the Mala and the Madiga. However, he is consulted by these castes also regarding the [287] auspicious timing of agricultural operations or to perform marriage ceremonies; and his astrological calculations are eagerly sought by all people. All castes, except the Panch Bramha group, [264] will accept food at his hands, but being 'pure and high-born' he cannot accept food from the hands of any but his caste fellows.

The Komtis rank next to the Brahmins. They are mostly traders 564 and money-lenders, keeping small shops where they sell grain 264 and general provisions. All castes except the Brahmin and the 582 Panch Bramha group accept food at their hands, but they do not take food from those castes whose social position is lower than their own, and thus can only accept food at the hands of the Brahmins.

The Reddi sections of the Kapu (agricultural) group, the Kummari and the Golla castes are of equal caste status. Although each is an endogamous caste, they will freely inter-dine with each other, and social contact between them is on a basis of equality. The position of the other Kapu section, viz. Muttarasi, is a little lower. The first Kapu section as well as the Golla will eat at their hands, but the Kummari will refuse food which they have touched.

On the next level are the Sale and the Gaondla, who enjoy a

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non-Aryan groups was taking place in Indian society and Hinduism was consolidating itself. The highly organized craftsmen's guilds of those days may perhaps have succeeded in maintaining their integrity and exclusiveness for a long time, but had ultimately to yield; yet the tension created by their resistance remained, and even when they were absorbed into the fold of Hindu society they were not admitted as equals to the groups of comparable social status and in consequence probably continued to maintain their age-long exclusiveness.

All the castes whose relative positions in the caste-hierarchy have been shown in the accompanying table are endogamous. There is a permanent social distance between them; the individual is born into a caste, and a subsequent change in status is, except to the very lowest strata of society, equally impossible upwards or downwards.¹ In general it may be said that people accept food at the hands of all castes occupying a higher level in this hierarchy, the only exception being that of the Vaddar, who do not accept food from the highly placed Sakali and Margali. Without exception people on a higher level refuse food from those on a lower level. Each caste has a traditional occupation sanctioned by religion, and these monopolies should not be infringed upon, except in the case of agriculture, which all may pursue.

Mention should here be made of the Jangam and the Katike castes, of each of which there is one family in Shamirpet. The Jangam are a semi-priestly caste ritually attached to the Baljas, for whom they tie the 'lingam'—a phallic symbol representing Shiva—and function as priests on the occasion of weddings. On the days of *Pitra Moksha Amavasya*² and *Shivaratri*,³ they visit Hindu houses, particularly of those peasants who follow the Shaivite⁴

¹ When a person is excommunicated or out-casted he is not down-graded and pushed into a lower caste; he is merely denied the privileges of equal participation in the socio-religious life of the community.

² The night of the New Moon in the Hindu month of Bhadrapada (August-September).

³ The day on which Shiva is believed to have drunk the world's poison, retaining it in his throat, and thereby saving mankind from possible harm from this poison.

⁴ Of the great gods of the Hindu 'trinity' Brahma is not worshipped because of his sinful infatuation for his own daughter, whilst Vishnu and Shiva are worshipped. Those who principally worship the former, usually in his incarnations as Rama and Krishna, are known as Vaishnava; those worshipping the latter as Shaiva or Shaivite. Cf. Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology* (London, 1930), pp. 56-59, 296-300, 360-362.

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

THE BRAHMIN

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There is only one Brahmin family in the village. The head of this family enjoys considerable local prestige owing to the fact of his birth, and also because he is a substantial landowner. He is the local priest as well as an astrologer. People consult him regarding the suitability of proposed marriages, and when negotiations are completed they seek his astrological calculations regarding an auspicious date and time for the wedding itself. He officiates at the marriage ceremony among the higher castes. On childbirth he is consulted about the planetary position at the actual time of the baby's birth, and its astrological implications for the child as well as for the parents and the other members of the family. If the reading indicates any difficulty, the Brahmin is often commissioned to offer special worship and perform the necessary rituals to ward off the evil. Similarly, after a death the Brahmin is consulted. If it is found that the time of death was inauspicious the members of the household may be asked to leave the residence temporarily, for a period of three to six months, according to the advice of the Brahmin. These consultations on the occasions of birth and death are generally sought only by the people of higher castes and by those who are well-to-do. Prescribed fees have to be paid to the Brahmin in cash for these consultations. Indirectly, the Brahmin contributes also to the agricultural activities of the community. He advises the agriculturists on when to start sowing at the beginning of the agricultural year. He is also consulted regarding the auspicious dates for starting weeding and harvesting. The date of the New Eating ceremony for the different families in the village is fixed by him. For these consultations no one pays him in cash. He visits the houses of his agriculturist clients fortnightly or once a month, especially in the harvesting season, and is customarily given a certain quantity of grain by each family.

THE KOMTI

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The Komtis are traders. They also function as village money-lenders. They keep a permanent small shop at some central point in the village, and also attend the weekly markets in the neighbouring villages. They generally sell provisions for cash, although things may also be bought on credit by those who are known to

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is worshipped. Incense is burnt by putting *ghee* (clarified butter) on a fire in front of Vishnu's image. Two red threads are tied by the Brahmin, first to the arms of the image, and a little later, after being removed therefrom, to his own arm. 776

Petramasa. The last day of the dark fortnight in the month of Bhadrapada is dedicated to ceremonies in honour of the ancestors and the deceased members of the household. In fact the whole fortnight preceding this day is occupied by this activity, for water must be offered to the dead on the *tithi* (the lunar day corresponding to that of their death). Among the higher castes, if the family can afford it, the Brahmin is invited to officiate at these rites. Those who cannot afford it, and people of the lower castes, manage it themselves. On the Petramasa day itself cooked rice, curds and several other preparations are offered to the deceased members of the lineage. Gifts of money, grain and vegetables are made to the Brahmin and the Jangam. 761 793

If there was a death in the family in the preceding year, during the Petramasa fortnight on the lunar day of death, an elaborate rite is performed to call home the spirit of the deceased and lodge it with other ancestor-spirits in one corner of the house. For these rites different branches of a family gather together under one main roof.

The Malas and Madigas as well as Vaddars and Erkalas do not have an elaborate observance. However, the first two make small gifts of money to the Jangam in honour of their dead, if the Jangam visits their houses.

Dasara. This festival is observed in the village both individually and collectively. All Hindus bath early in the morning. The Brahmin and the Komti worship a bunch of *shami* (*Prosopis spicigera*) leaves along with the images of gods; others worship only the deities. Observed on the tenth day of Ashvina, Dasara is regarded as a non-vegetarian festival. With the exception of Brahmins and Komtis, who are vegetarians, the other non-vegetarian castes make it a point to cook some meat dish on this day. At midday people worship the gods in their houses. 796

In the afternoon the Brahmin visits the Deshmukh's house, and worships a bunch of *shami* leaves and the headman's ancestral weapons. In the meantime a flag is hoisted on the central flag post near the police station. Madigas beat their drums and people start collecting. When all the responsible village elders assemble

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rite of *sesshahoman* must be performed. For this the bride and bridegroom are seated before a fire, sacred verses are read, and incense is burnt. This completes the marriage. Later the bride and bridegroom are seated facing each other for dinner. The ground around the wooden seats on which they sit is decorated with multi-coloured designs. While eating the two are encouraged to throw a few morsels into each other's plates. Several minor rites follow. In one the newly-married couple are asked to address each other by using personal names. The bride has to show great reluctance in doing this, for a wife generally does not utter the name of her husband. She is given a doll, symbolizing a child, and is asked to entrust it to the care of 'its father' on the pretext that she has to cook or to do other household work. The next day, after a few minor rituals, the girl is 'given away' to her husband and his parents. This is done to the accompaniment of heart-rending and pathetic songs. The father asks her to regard the home of her father-in-law henceforward as her own home; and never to do anything—in thought, word or deed—that might bring discredit to her parents. He then begs the girl's father-in-law to treat her well, to ignore her faults, failings and shortcomings, and to teach her the ways of their family. The girl goes away with her husband. In her new home she has to go through a series of rites, worship of the family god and feasting. After three to seven days she returns to her parents for a brief stay.

Among all the castes the general tone of marriage ritual suggests the influences of Sanskritic rites, but the Brahmin does not officiate at the marriages of all castes. He is invited by the Komti, the agricultural castes, the Kummari, the Golla, the Sale and the Gaondla. The barber and the washerman invite the Brahmin if they can afford it, otherwise they manage with their own caste-priest. The Panch Bramha group has its own priests. The other groups occupying lower positions in the caste hierarchy invite a specialist from their own caste to officiate at the ceremony. Naturally recitation of sacred verses and marriage formulae from the scriptures is confined to ceremonies conducted by the Brahmin; in the other castes, while the pattern followed is essentially the same, the Sanskrit chants are absent. Other occupational castes whose co-operation is required in the ceremony are: the barber, the potter, the Madiga and the carpenter. The barber assists the parties during negotiations, carries their messages,

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order to get the rice and the buffalo's head. The idea of carrying the head and rice round a village, so the people said, is to draw a kind of cordon on every side of it and prevent the entrance of the evil spirits. Should any one in the town refuse to subscribe for the festival, his house is omitted from the procession, and left to the tender mercies of the devils. This procession is called *bali haranam*;¹ and in this district *inams*, rent-free lands, are held from Government by certain families of Mādigās for performing it. Besides the buffalo, large numbers of sheep and goats and fowls are sacrificed, each householder giving at least one animal. The head Mādigā who kills the animals takes the carcass and distributes the flesh among the members of his family. Often cases come into the courts to decide who has the right to kill them. As the sacrifice cannot wait for the tedious processes of the law, the elders of the village settle the question at once, pending an appeal to the courts. But in the town of Masulipatam, a Mādigā is specially licensed by the Municipality for the purpose, and all disputes are avoided.

Cocanada. At Cocanada there is only one Grāma-Devatā, Nukalamma (from Nuku, a Tamil word, meaning "to beat"); but she is very ill-tempered, they told me, and gives much trouble. Curiously enough, the present pūjārī is a woman of the fisherman caste. The office was hereditary in her family and she is the only surviving member of it. A male relative acts as deputy-pūjārī. Offerings are made to Nukalamma every day, doubtless on account of her temper. One custom I found observed here, which is not uncommon in these parts. When a victim's head has been cut off, it is put before the shrine and water poured on it. The offerer then waits to see whether the mouth opens. If it does, it is a sign that the sacrifice is accepted.² Another ceremony observed here is significant and, doubtless, a relic of the primitive idea

¹ Sanksrit for "presentation of the offering."

² See p. 55 n. 1, above.

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the house outside with cow-dung and make three horizontal lines with kunkuma (a red paste of turmeric and lime), with a dot above and below, and a semi-circle on the right side with a dot in the middle, thus:—



The symbol on the right represents the sun and moon: that on the left is the Śaivite sectarian mark. They sacrifice to these symbols sheep, goats, and fowls. It is curious that, in these private sacrifices at home, they pour water on the sheep and goats to see whether they shiver, as a sign of acceptance,¹ though this is not done in the public sacrifices at Ellore.

Dharmaja-Gudem, near Ellore. At a village called Dharmaja-Gudem, about sixteen miles from Ellore, while the main features of the festivals are the same as those found elsewhere, there are two or three peculiarities, which deserve notice. The ordinary grāma-devatās of the village are Ellaramma, Gaṅgammā, Mutyalamma, and Ravelamma, who are represented by four stone pillars about six feet high, with figures of women carved on them, standing in an open field on the outskirts of the village: but when an epidemic breaks out, Mutyalamma, Gaṅgammā, Anḱamma and Mahālakshmiamma are the deities propitiated, and special images are made of them. Those of the first three are made of clay, but that of Mahālakshmiamma is made of turmeric kneaded into a paste. Then, again, it is noticeable that a Brāhman acts as pūjārī of Mahālakshmi, a washerman as pūjārī of Gaṅgammā, and a potter as pūjārī of Anḱamma. The Brāhman pūjārī presides over the worship for the greater part of the festival, which lasts for about three months, and during that time the people come almost every day and offer flowers, fruits, cocoanuts, camphor and incense, but no animal sacrifices. All this time, too, some nautch-

¹ See p. 55 above.

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consent. The case was decided in the High Court in favour of the plaintiff. A similar dispute is in progress now.

About half of the Brahmins are well-to-do. Most of them have no children. They adopt children. The wealth of the father and of the adoptive father goes to the son. Thus the properties of two persons go to one. Being well-to-do, they do not engage in work; but spent their time in idleness and gossip. Some engage in money-lending at usurious interest.

POTHAVARAM, RAZOLE TALUK, GODAVARI DISTRICT.

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[By B. Lakshminarayana Sastri, Christian College, Madras.]

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Population.—Brahmins, 8 families, 53 individuals; Sudras, 191 families, 948 individuals; Muhammadans, 5 families, 28 individuals. Birth-rate 44 per thousand; death-rate 35 per thousand.

"The Brahmins used to monopolize the land till recently and cultivate it through non-Brahmin (Pariah) servants. But being far away from their land their property was not safe with the uneducated Pariahs. A sect of non-Brahmins called Kapus are now buying lands through their economy and industry and low standard of life. The Brahmin having to maintain a high standard is slowly incurring debts. There is a chance of the non-Brahmin Kapu sect in the village gaining the lands if they maintain their low standard of life and economical and industrious habits. While the non-Brahmin always remains in the field or garden the Brahmin stays for a major part of the day in the main village as he has to perform his daily religious ceremonies and social functions. The Brahmin cannot live in such an isolation as the non-Brahmins. He cannot do hand labour and his supervision is inefficient.

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"People buy land as a secure form of investment. The educated classes after saving money buy lands with it though they never cultivate it. It is the only form of secure investment with which they are familiar being ignorant of other safe investments. Moreover, land investment pays a man better and gives him some status among his neighbours. The emigration from this village is slow. Some are leaving for neighbouring towns for their sons' education while a few are emigrating to Burma for labour. The former rarely return except during vacations while the latter return after four or five years. This emigration once started catches fire, education is simply being undergone for appointments, there being a sort of respect and awe attached to this sort of life. Every average villager now eagerly wants to educate his son in spite of heavy debts and great inconveniences. Economically it is a loss though intellectually it may be a gain. Socially it is removing some of the superstitions of the villagers. The mixing with the educated villagers is removing many deep-rooted superstitions. The emigration to Burma of coolies is to a small extent an economic gain; but at the expense of family life and social intercourse. The husband has to part from his wife and friends for a very long time. He does not even become intellectually advanced and his earnings are spent on drink."